

their Christianity upon the official notice of the authorities, insulted the Emperor or the gods, and refused to take the oath or sacrifice on ceremonial occasions, then martyrdom was the result, and little notice was taken, for life was cheap. Diocletian, as we have seen, rather patronised than persecuted Christianity. Maximian's inclinations towards cruelty were kept in check by the known wishes of his senior colleague. Constantius, the Caesar of Gaul, was one of those refined characters, tolerant and sympathetic by nature, to whom the idea of persecution for the sake of religion was intensely repugnant; and Galerius, the Caesar of Pannonia, the most fanatical pagan of the group, was not likely, at any rate during the first few years after his elevation, to run counter to the wishes of his patron.

What was it, then, that wrought the fatal change in the mind of Diocletian and turned him from benevolent neutrality to fierce antagonism? Lactantius attributes it solely to the baleful influence of Galerius, whom he paints in the very blackest colours. He was a wild beast, a savage barbarian of alien blood, tall in stature, a mountain of flesh, abnormally bloated, terrifying to look at, and with a voice that made men shiver.* Behind this monster stood his mother, a barbarian woman from beyond the Danube, priestess of some wild deity of the mountains, imbued with a fanatical hatred of the Christians, which she was for ever instilling into her son. When we have stripped away the obvious exaggeration of this onslaught we may still accept

* *De Mort. Persec.* c. 9.